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CAPE OF GOOD HOPE

Department of Agriculture.

**INDIGENOUS TIMBERS OF THE
CAPE.**

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INDIGENOUS TIMBERS OF THE CAPE.

By D. E. HUTCHINS, Conservator of Forests, Western Conservancy.

CALLITRIS ARBOREA—CAPE CEDAR.

This is a true Cedar and the most valuable of the indigenous timbers. It is sweetly scented. The timber is very durable, easily worked, and is used for almost every purpose both indoors and out-of-doors. The English Church at Clanwilliam is fitted with it. In the Cedarberg farms it is used both for housebuilding and furniture, and in these houses its aroma is certainly noticeable. It is the sole indigenous Cape timber that is not liable to crack and warp on drying. Unfortunately it is only found in one locality, the Cedarberg Mountains, about one hundred miles north of Cape Town: and here all the large trees have been long ago cut out. In size and appearance the Cape Cedar much resembles the *Cedrus atlantica* of the Atlas Mountains. The Cedar country has been demarcated under the Forest Act and the remains of the forest are now protected from fire, goats, and the felling of all live trees; while 50 acres are yearly planted with Cedar. The demarcated forest area where these Cedars grow amounts to 98,000 acres. About £850 yearly represents the total forest expenditure on an area greater than the whole actual forest area at Knysna. The Cape Cedar produces an abundance of good seed and is easily propagated, contrasting in this respect with most of the other native trees. It does not occur naturally below 3,000 feet, the winter snow limit.

Sir James Alexander, in his exploring expedition in the interior of Africa, mentioning the Cedar tree, says one of them was cut down in 1836 which was 36 feet in girth, and out of whose giant arms 1,000 feet of planking were sawn. He bitterly complains that this noble tree is fast disappearing in the Cedar Mountains. Mr. W. van Meyer, another South African traveller, says that in former days the whole of the Cedarberg mountain chain was studded with those trees, but that of late, axe and fire have done their utmost to destroy these valuable forests.

PTEROXYLON UTILE—SNEEZEWOOD.

Perhaps the most durable wood in the world. Piles in the Port Elizabeth Harbour Works were only equalled by Greenheart in durability. Sneezeewood heartwood is impervious to the ordinary Teredo of extra-tropical waters. Pieces of wood have been dug out of the ground like a stone, as sound after half a century as when they were buried. Its chief use is for fencing posts, a Sneezeewood fencing post being worth more than an iron post imported from Europe.

If its durability may justly rank with stone, its strength may be compared to iron, for except for its power of being split it is as difficult to work as some kinds of stone and iron. This difficulty of working, added to its liability to unsoundness at the heart and crookedness, renders it unlikely that it will ever serve any other important purpose than as a fencing pole. For this it is unrivalled. As a tree it is often small and ill-shaped, but, at its best, in warm semi-tropical forests it becomes large and well grown. Dimensions up to 6 feet in diameter and 60 feet total height are occasionally met with on the mountains. It occurs along the coast hills and mountains from near Port Elizabeth to Delagoa Bay both in the coast scrubs and in the high timber forests on the mountains. Of a somewhat slow growth and not easy to propagate and rear no large plantations have yet been made of Sneezewood, but it is specially conserved and encouraged in the forest where it occurs naturally.

The heartwood is impregnated with a pungent essential oil causing fits of sneezing when sawn. Hence the popular name of the tree. It no doubt owes its extraordinary durability to this pungent oil.

PODOCARPUS ELONGATA—OUTENIQUA YELLOW-WOOD.

This is the largest and most generally useful tree in South Africa. It frequently attains giant dimensions with diameters up to ten feet, straight cylindrical trunks, and huge far-spreading crowns. From this and the allied *P. thunbergii* the Yellow-wood planking and sleepers of South Africa are produced. The Cape Government creosotes an average of 100,000 Yellow-wood sleepers yearly for use on the railways. The old buildings in Cape Colony, Natal and the Transvaal were commonly constructed of sawn Yellow-wood.

It is found throughout the belt of heavy evergreen forest that occurs at intervals along the coast mountains that encircle South Africa, rising in altitude as the latitude decreases, from the southern coast to the Drakensberg of Natal and the mountains of the N.E. Transvaal. Yellow-wood has the virtues and vices of other timbers of its class, of which the New Zealand Kauri and Rimu are examples. Yellow-wood is not too hard to be easily sawn and worked; it is of even structure and makes an excellent flooring board. But it is liable to crack and warp, not tough, and being non-resinous very perishable out-of-doors unless impregnated.

As a forest tree, Yellow-wood is slow-growing, shade-bearing, and with a fair natural reproduction. Little planting has been done, as far more valuable timbers such as Cedar can be produced for the cost of growing Yellow-wood: but Yellow-wood is carefully conserved and reproduced naturally in the forests that are systematically managed, and young trees are produced naturally in sufficient abundance to ensure an increase rather than diminution of the supply of these useful trees.

PODOCARPUS THUNBERGII—UPRIGHT YELLOW-WOOD.

This species differs little from the larger Yellow-wood. When cut up the planks of the two are doubtfully distinguishable. Upright Yellow-wood is a smaller, more tapering tree with a broader

leaf, rougher bark, and slightly harder timber than *Outeniqua* Yellow-wood.

OCOTEA BULLATA—Stinkwood.

Stinkwood follows the belt of the indigenous evergreen forest from Cape Town to the Woodbush Range in the North-East of the Transvaal, this forest belt rising in altitude through the Transkei and Natal as lower latitudes are reached. In this belt of indigenous forest Stinkwood must take rank as the most valuable tree. As a furniture wood, it shows fine variations of tint, from a golden yellow through all shades of brown to black. It polishes well and produces exceedingly handsome effects with its different contrasts of colour. But furniture made from Stinkwood is the most expensive that can be purchased in Cape Town, mainly owing to the difficulty of working and the liability of the wood to warp badly. As a wagon wood Stinkwood is sufficiently hard and tough to form one of the best of timbers, and the main use of Stinkwood is for wagon wood.

Trees up to 60 or 80 feet in height are occasionally seen, but it generally occurs in the forest in the form of clusters of coppice shoots, more or less straight, and more or less sound, but the timber is almost always so irregular in shape that it is difficult to cube a tree as it stands in the forest.

Stinkwood has a very weak natural reproduction, and it is hardly possible to propagate it artificially, the fleshy seed being difficult to obtain, and often rotten or worm-eaten as it hangs on the trees.

The leaf has an aromatic spicy odour. The disgusting smell, from which the tree gets its name, is in the bark and the timber of the green tree, but the effluvia soon passes away from the cut timber.



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